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THE CHURCH'S OPPORTUNITY IN THE PRESENT CRISIS

BY

HENRY T. HODGKIN

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"THERE are many who believe that War is disallowed by Christianity, and who would rejoice that it were for ever abolished; but there are few who are willing to maintain an undaunted and unyielding stand against it. They can talk of the loveliness of Peace, aye, and argue against the lawfulness of War; but when difficulty or suffering would be the consequence, they will not refuse to do what they know to be unlawful; they will not practise the peacefulness which they say they admire. Those who are ready to sustain the consequences of undeviating obedience are the supporters of whom Christianity stands in need. She wants men who are willing to *suffer* for her principles."—JONATHAN DYMOND.

"I will venture to say this, that if all the ministers of Christ's Gospel were with one voice constantly, courageously, earnestly, to preach to the nations the Truce of God, and were to denounce War, not merely as costly and cruel and barbarous, but as essentially and eternally un-Christian, another War in the civilised world would become impossible."—HENRY RICHARD.

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"THE European catastrophe," says Mr. Wells, "is the tragedy of the weak though righteous Christian will." If the whole Church of Christ in all lands had truly believed in the possibility of the reign of peace, if she had striven with unity of purpose to overcome the war spirit, is it not certain that this war could never have been? Whatever we have to say about the proximate causes of the war, the ultimate ones constitute an indictment of the Christian will. We have not seriously attempted to overthrow the temper out of which wars spring. We have not believed in the good faith and good will of the other man or of the other nation. We have not devoted our best thought to showing the world that there is a better way. We have opposed the stern, unbending will of the makers of war with pious resolutions and petitions, and vain longing for a better state of things.

The virile philosophy represented by Bernhardi, whether in England or in Germany, is not to be overcome except by something more virile. On one side are men with a clear conception of the end to be achieved and the means to be used, and prepared for any sacrifice that may be demanded. We also, on the other side, need a clear conception of what we stand for,

and what are the weapons of our warfare. Still more do we need a body of men and women utterly committed to the cause of goodwill, and prepared to accept every shaft of cynicism which may be directed at them, every limitation of personal comfort, and even the sacrifice of life itself.

The Church has in this crisis a supreme opportunity of leading the world away from war. It needs no prophet now to tell men that war is a terrible evil. We all see it and feel it. The horrors of battle are preaching an eloquent sermon on the reality and consequences of human sin, and thus accomplishing for the Church a vital part of her mission on a world scale. Everywhere men are saying "There must be something very much amiss with us if we can only settle our disputes in so gruesome a way, involving so vast a total of suffering and sorrow." Wherever we locate the major part of the blame, we cannot get away from the fact that there is something wrong, and that not even the best of us is wholly without fault. Even if we have set our faces in the right direction, we have at least been guilty of the weak will—we whose will might have been all-conquering as it was yielded to and reinforced by the will of the Living God.

If we are to seize the present opportunity we need first a clear conception of the Church's function. This is not to be confused with the duty of the individual, who is bound to recognise many claims upon his loyalty. Each man must consider the call of his family, his city, his country, as well as that of the Church, and, having done so, must decide, in the sight of God, what his personal duty is.

If we are able rightly to determine the Church's function it will indeed be found that loyalty to the Church includes, as in a larger whole, loyalty to family,

to city, or to nation. We are, however, so hedged about with limitations that there often appear to be conflicting loyalties, simply because we have found as yet no higher synthesis.

For the purpose then of the present paper, we shall make no attempt to weigh the relative claims, but shall simply endeavour to state in a positive way what we take to be the distinctive mission of the Church.

Nor is this to exclude many other ministries to which she is undeniably called by the present stress. Hers it is to minister to the wounded and non-combatant sufferers, to help to save the nation from the temptations which come with defeat or victory, to comfort those who mourn, to bind up broken hearts, to teach us how in the hour of conflict we may truly love our enemies. All this will be dictated to us by the bond of our common humanity, as well as by the higher imperative of the Will of God. Beyond these immediate duties may we not see a still vaster opportunity given to us even now, in order that we may not miss the brighter future which awaits us when the war is past.

1.—*The Church of Christ is set in the nation to witness to the supernatural as against the material forces.*

We are passing through days when the nation is engaged in a great material conflict. Its Government, and its citizens generally, believe it to be striving for certain high ideals of human life, for honour as between nations, for freedom from the dominance of militarism, for a national ideal of service as against a national ideal of aggrandisement and aggression. To the vast majority of our fellow-countrymen these high ends justify even the terrible means that are being employed for their achievement. We cannot close our eyes,

however, to the nature of the forces which we are employing in this supreme conflict. We are calculating our chance of success by the numbers, the discipline and the generalship of our armies, by the efficiency of our fleets, and by the " silver bullets " on which these depend, in short, by the military force which can be employed on one side or the other. Every morning, when we open our newspapers, we are reminded afresh of this balancing of power. Every victory and every defeat brings us back to calculating in terms of military efficiency. Every day, as we discuss the war, we assume that the result depends upon the relative strength of the armed forces opposed to each other.

In England we feel ourselves comparatively secure. The seas that surround us, watched with ceaseless vigilance by our immense fleet, give us an assurance that we are safe from actual invasion. Even in the midst of doubt and uncertainty we are far too ready to put our faith in these things. It is all too easy to assume that the material conflict is identical with the conflict of ideals, and that victory or defeat in the one will mean success or failure in the other.

Deeper down than militarism lies the materialism out of which it springs. The whole idea that armed force can overthrow false ideals or establish true ones, rests upon an inadequate conception of God, and upon a failure to rely fully upon the power of love and goodness to overcome evil.

Now, the fundamental conception of the Christian Church involves a protest against every form of materialism. That which unites the members of the Church in a living fellowship, and constitutes the ultimate differentia between the members of the Body of Christ, and the rest of mankind, is the possession of a common life, derived from the life of God, by faith in

Christ. The supreme function of the Church is to call men unto the life of faith in God, that is, out of the life of faith in anything else. Christ spent Himself in this work. He was perpetually summoning men from the lesser securities into the larger trust. To the young man whose sense of security sprang from his moral life and his great possessions the Master said, " Go, sell all that thou hast," not so much in order to test the measure of his love as to throw him back upon the necessity for faith in God. Would not His message to us in this day be, " How hardly shall they that trust in Dreadnoughts enter into the Kingdom of God ? " According to Christ's definition of faith, it is, in a real sense, easier for the Belgians to believe in God to-day than for us. We have so many other things to trust to. Those whose last earthly defences are swept away are thrown back upon the Eternal God.

It may be freely admitted that this constitutes a call to a kind of faith beyond anything we commonly exercise. Nevertheless this faith is enshrined in the prayers and hymns we daily use, not less than in the words of our Lord. What do we mean when we sing

> Sufficient is Thine arm alone
> And our defence is sure.

What place is there for armies and navies in that profession of faith ? As a matter of simple fact we are trusting so fully to them that we never give any opportunity to the living God to show us whether our defence would be sure with Him alone or not. What He can do in defence of the defenceless will never be known by those who entrench themselves behind modern fortresses.

This is not to say we are never to use material means for spiritual ends. When, however, we come to rely upon them, we are putting a serious obstacle in the

way of the development of that order of faith which must be manifested if the Kingdom of God is truly to be established on earth. In this case, moreover, we are relying upon means which involve a denial of the Spirit of Love. We are in danger of being utterly led away from the real issue by discussing whether the use of force is ever justified. War is not simply "the use of force," it is the organised murder of innocent men upon a terrific scale.

In making this plea we would not be understood as maintaining that our nation could, in its present state of spiritual enlightenment, suddenly lay down its arms in the midst of this war. What we are persuaded is that the Church's function is to lead the nation to such a faith in God that we should be able literally to say "There is none other that fighteth for us." If the nation were able to take this stand we should make such discoveries of God as would change the face of the world. It does not follow that even then God would protect all we now think worth fighting for, but are we not safe in assuming that He would maintain and strengthen all that is truly "worth fighting for"? The Church could render no greater service to the nation than by leading it into such a faith. By identifying herself with the use of military force she forfeits her right to fulfil this service.

In the end, it is moral and spiritual forces that must be brought to bear for the destruction of immoral and materialistic ideals. The great mistake of Prussian militarism is the attempt to spread culture by force of arms. Our nation is in grave danger of falling into the same error to-day. In fact it may well be urged that we are already doing so. If the Church surrenders the outworks to the enemy, she will find, ere long, that the guns designed to defend the citadel have been turned

upon it, and are being used to destroy it. This is precisely what happens whenever the Church preaches a holy war. A stupendous spiritual task awaits the nation and the world. If the war spirit is to be exorcised, it must be by love and faith. In this crusade the Church alone can take the lead. It is her great chance of serving the world. There is no one to do it if she fails. When the Church puts herself on the side of the material forces, she weakens immeasurably the power of the blow that she will wish to strike when the war is over. Let us recognise at once that we cannot end war by war. There is only one remedy for this disease, and that remedy is held in trust for humanity by the Church of Christ. To the fulfilment of this holy trust she is summoned by every shot that is fired, and by every tear that is shed in these days. No task before the Church is more insistent, no need in our nation goes deeper to the root of our disease, than the task of proclaiming and the need of trusting in the invincible might of the Living God.

2.—*The Church is set in the nation to witness to the supra-national as against the exclusively national spirit.*

In all the nations that are now at war with one another, there are multitudes of men and women who daily take upon their lips the words which Christ taught His disciples to use in prayer. The first word unites us with all who offer this prayer. The second calls us to remember that we are united not only as supplicants, but as the children of one Father. It is our brothers and sisters, members with us in the family of God, with whom we are now engaged in deadly conflict. We have paid our taxes, we have built our ships, we have

drilled our armies—for this; in order that we might, at this moment, be as efficient as possible in the destruction of men and women who, like ourselves, are made in the image of God, who pray one prayer with us, who own one Father, who plead the grace of one Saviour. The fact that we regard the war as a defensive one (as do the Germans on their part) does not alter the fact that hundreds of thousands of men have to be killed in the process.

The Church stands for an ideal that transcends the merely national. Her message to the individual saves him from egotism and leads him to take up a relationship of service to other individuals, even if he has to lay down his life for them. Her message to the nation should lead to such a development of the national life as will lead into service to all the other nations.

In becoming a member of the body of Christ I enter into a fellowship which makes a greater claim upon me than any national bond, and which is more enduring than the divisions of colour and race. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither German nor English, for all are one man. This is an ideal inherent in the conception of the Christian Church from the beginning. The Church, in its essence, embodies a revolt against racial antagonisms. Jesus Christ called us to worship the Father of whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

Yet it is a plain fact that to-day many of our prayers are to a tribal God. Every time we pray for victory, do we not unwittingly surrender the highest ideal of the Church? Every word from pulpit or religious press which impels the children of the Heavenly Father to destroy one another is a degradation of the Church's high office. Without doubt many with the purest motives and the strongest loyalty to duty, are taking

this course. Judgment cannot be passed upon them, but rather upon the defective ideal of the Church that makes such action possible.

Here, again, do we not thoughtlessly surrender the outworks at a cost far greater than we dream? There never has been a time in human history when the Church was called more clearly to proclaim the unity of mankind in Jesus Christ.

Of course, as Englishmen, we all believe that we are in the right in this dispute, and we construe our action as a war on behalf of humanity. It should give us pause to remember that Germany does the same. Can we identify the cause of any one nation with the Kingdom of God? The evil which we believe we see in Germany is a nationalism that seeks to establish itself as a predominant force in Europe and in the world, that tramples over lesser nationalities and over what it regards as inferior cultures, and that asserts its national idea as the one hope of redeeming humanity. How are we to overcome this? Not by asserting a different national ideal as the hope of the world, but by replacing for the exclusively national ideal a conception of human progress in which each nation can fulfil its ideals and thus become a partner with all others in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. The cry of "Deutschland über Alles;" can only be truly met by the combined effort of the followers of Christ in all lands to seek first the Kingdom of God. The *Morning Post* in a recent article spoke of the danger to the country from the disease of "internationalism." To the writer it appeared to threaten our existence as a nation. Is it not fair to say that this "disease" is normal health to the Church of Christ, and that any nationalism that it would destroy is not fit to take its place in the Kingdom of God?

The mission of the Church is reconciliation. Out of the wreck of contending nations she is summoned to the task of building up a new and larger unity. This she can only do by realising and cherishing the deeper unity that knits all her members into one most holy Body.

Is it possible to believe that the voice which calls men into this battle in the name of the Lord of Hosts is the voice of a Church which is truly catholic in spirit? There is no hope for humanity outside of Christ. In Him we shall yet learn how all the nations can work out each its own destiny, and still dwell together in unity. What is needed to-day is that the Church should preach this Gospel of universal love with such conviction that we shall be delivered from the narrow shackles of an exclusive nationalism, and brought to realise our unity in the family of God. In calling men to that love of humanity which was the consuming passion of the heart of Christ, the Church, and the Church alone, can lead the warring nations of Europe out of darkness into light.

3.—*The Church is set in the nation to proclaim the coming of a new day.*

This is the hour of darkness and sorrow. The cloud rests heavily upon many a home which is bereaved and desolate. Scarcely a ray of light seems to penetrate through the gloom in our little sister nation of Belgium; and in the sorrow and the ruin the bitterest of all thoughts is this—that the Church is in part responsible for it all. Amidst the fair flowers of sacrifice and service and devotion and unity, there grow up the rank weeds of misrepresentation, retaliation, fierce anger, and the lurking grudge. Surely it is an evil day

that has fallen upon us. The day of the Lord is far other than we thought and hoped.

What the world has a right to expect from the Church is relief from this weight of evil. It has always been the Church's prerogative to raise the banner of hope. Of what use is our religion if it cannot lift up our eyes to see beyond the gloom? In the inmost heart of our Gospel is the conviction that good must conquer ill, that love must triumph over hate. Love was not finally defeated and discredited on Calvary. The Resurrection means to us nothing less than the certainty that God is on the side of goodness and gentleness, and is sure to give them the victory in the end. Now, in the deepest hour of night, is the time for the Church to speak with confidence of the dawn. Too easily have we believed that this war must last for many months, or even years. We have accepted as inevitable the prolongation of a conflict every day of which adds to the misery of the innocent and to the growth of hatred and ill-will. But if the Church does not believe in the possibility of peace, who will? We may not see any means by which it can be reached. Across every known path there seems to stand some mountain of difficulty; but the Church stands for the belief in a God who will make rough places smooth, and before whose word the mountain shall become a plain. If the Church can truly hope in God to-day may she not win through her triumphant faith the victory of a speedy and righteous peace? To reach this end might not all the several sections of the Church Universal unite in calling men to the universal prayer which can accomplish more than the skill of all the diplomats and statesmen in Europe. From every part of our wide Empire men of different race and creed have joined in an outburst of loyalty to our King and Emperor, and in glad sacrifice

for our nation's cause. May not the Church find a new and larger unity in fulfilling to-day her prophetic function in the world, as, from all the scattered outposts and from all the warring countries there shall go up one great voice calling upon the Prince of Peace to give peace once more in this distracted world? Out of the stress of the world's deep need as we see it to-day, might we not even believe that a new and more impelling force than ever before will be given to the movement toward reunion in the Church, and that we should learn to see in truer perspective the things which still maintain the spirit of war within the body of Christ itself?

This, then, is the hour of the Church of Christ. Before her stands open a door of opportunity which no man can shut. On the one portal is inscribed "Faith," and on the other "Love," while overhead, shining brightly and lighting all our way, hangs the lamp of Hope. If the Church is to enter this door she must boldly claim the absolute and utter loyalty of every member. She calls in the name of her Lord: "If any man hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters"—yes, and nation also—"he cannot be My disciple." Such a hatred for Christ's sake involves no disloyalty to family or to nation. The Church can only truly serve the nation as she learns to serve the whole world, and as she follows Christ, her Master, at whatever cost. There is no other way by which the weak will may become so strong as to turn apparent and temporary defeat into the lasting triumph of peace and goodwill. Before she can hope to fulfil this task must we not all recognise more deeply than we have yet done how dismally we have already failed in holding up the standard of Christ, how we have compromised with un-Christian ideals, how far we are

involved in the very sins against which we are called upon to protest. Only in the spirit of sincere penitence can we call others to penitence. If only the leaders of Christian thought in all lands, should be joined together in humility and shame because of this evil that has befallen us, there would go forth from the Church a voice which would in truth convince the world of sin of righteousness, and of judgment.

Can the Church enter upon this high mission? Will she prove worthy of it? Upon the answer to these questions there seem to hang issues so momentous that the mind fails to grasp them. If the Church of Christ disappoints us, where are we to look? In all the nations of Europe men and women are seeking for a way out of the vicious circle in which war breeds war. Amidst the swirling tide of materialism, of hatred, and of despair, where are the men to build again the foundations of the unshakable kingdom in faith, in love, in hope? The men and women of goodwill who will take in hand this task in the name of the Eternal God will have to face misunderstanding and scorn. They may be regarded as lacking in patriotism, and as mere dreamers. But they will be supported by the power of that living Spirit which of old made men see visions and dream dreams. They will know they are on the side of the Prince of Peace. To all the forces of militarism, of scepticism or of indifference they can with confidence reply:

"Dreamers of Dreams"! We take the taunt with gladness,
Knowing that God, beyond the years you see.
Hath wrought the dreams that count with you for madness,
Into the substance of the life to be.

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